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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAOKO 001244

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SUBJECT: TUAREG AND GOM OFFICIALS PROVIDE DETAILS ON GSPC
ATTACK AND ACCORDS

REF: BAMAOKO 1112

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(S) Summary: On October 26 Acherif ag Mohammed, a presidential advisor on Tuareg affairs, provided the Embassy with further details regarding the October 23 battle between the Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) and the GSPC. Acherif remains in close contact via telephone with ADC leaders Iyad ag Ghali, Ahmada ag Bibi and others. Acherif described the October 23 battle that left at least 7 ADC fighters dead as an "accident" with "extremely worrisome" consequences. Also on October 26, a key official within the Ministry of Territorial Administration who is also reportedly close to President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) candidly told the Embassy that the GSPC's recent vow to eliminate the ADC's leadership worked to the GOM's advantage, stating that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." While this latter view reflects widespread anger in southern Mali toward the Tuareg rebels, it does not have great currency within the senior Malian leadership. Minister of Territorial Administraion Kone told the Ambassador recently that the GSPC must be eliminated from northern Mali by the Malian army, and President Toure has said that the GSPC is a problem that must be addressed by security forces from the sub-region. End Summary.

An "Accident" with Serious Consequences

2.(S) Acherif ag Mohammed, presidential advisor and confidant of Tuareg rebel leader Iyad ag Ghali, described the October 23 battle between the ADC and GSPC as an "accident." According to Acherif, the ADC patrol that has tracked the GSPC since the first skirmish on September 19 was "looking but not looking" for the GSPC. In other words, ag Ghali had ordered the patrol to follow the GSPC but avoid contact. The patrol was also apparently instructed not to travel beyond the zone of Kidal and into region of Timbuktu which is controlled by Arab/Berabich smugglers. On the morning of October 23, however, the ADC patrol unexpectedly came across recent GSPC tire tracks leading into the Timbuktu zone. After a brief argument, two vehicles comprised of, in Acherif words, "undisciplined" ADC elements, sped off into the region of Timbuktu in search of the GSPC. A few minutes later the two ADC vehicles crested a ridge and unexpectedly drove into the GSPC camp, with disastrous results. Hearing the gun-fire and possible RPG explosions, the rest of the ADC contingent quickly traversed the Kidal-Timbuktu frontier to support the two vehicles already engaged. ADC fighters reported that the GSPC had 8 to 10 vehicles. It appears that the ADC has recovered the body of at least one of the two Tuaregs taken prisoner by the GSPC during the fight.

3.(S) By entering the Berabich controlled zone of Timbuktu to engage and pursue the GSPC, the ADC violated what appears to have been a long-standing informal understanding between Tuareg and Berabich groups to steer clear of each other's territory. Acherif said that he could not predict the Berabich response to this incursion. Echoing the statement posted to the ADC's web site following the October 23 attack, Acherif said some Berabich living in and around the town of Timbuktu were known GSPC supporters. When asked if he found the apparent widening of the conflict in the north worrisome, Acherif said it was "more than a little worrisome. It is extremely worrisome."

4.(S) Acherif reported that ATT dispatched the president of the Algiers Accords oversight committee, Mamadou Diagouraga, and the Governor of Kidal to meet with Iyad ag Ghali nearly three weeks ago. Ag Ghali told the delegation that until the Algiers Accords were implemented, he had no interest in talking with ATT. Acherif also reported that there were many rumors regarding the "presence of American forces in Taoudenni," (sic) in the northernmost portion of the region of Timbuktu. He said that many in northern Mali believed that the ADC was receiving aid from the U.S. in addition to the military hardware provided by Algeria. (Note: Although a JCET exercise is ongoing in Mali, there are no U.S. forces north of Timbuktu. A planned Defense Attache visit to Taoudenni via U.S. military aircraft in late September was canceled at the request of Malian military leadership in Timbuktu, on grounds of insufficient time to implement appropriate security. End note.)

Role of GOM

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5.(S) The GOM has neither taken an official position on the ADC-GSPC fighting in the north, nor publicly commented on Algeria's role in supporting the ADC, apparently undercutting the portion of the Algiers Accords requiring the rebels to turn back their arms to the GOM. On October 26 a key official and ATT confidant in the Ministry of Territorial Administration (which is charged, under the leadership of Minister Kafougouna Kone, with implementing the Algiers Accords) told the Embassy that hostilities between the GSPC and the ADC worked to the GOM's advantage. The GSPC, said the official, vowed to eliminate all of the ADC's leadership.

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend," said the individual, and he did not respond further when asked if this meant the GOM was favoring the GSPC. While this latter view reflects widespread anger in southern Mali toward the Tuareg rebels, it does not have great currency within the senior Malian leadership. Minister of Territorial Administraion Kone told the Ambassador recently that the GSPC must be eliminated from northern Mali by the Malian army, and President Toure has said that the GSPC is a problem that must be addressed by security forces from the sub-region.

Comment: Saving the Accords

6.(S) The heavy losses suffered by the ADC on October 23, their incursion into what was previously regarded as Berabich territory, and vows of revenge by the GSPC have significantly weakened the Algiers Accords implementation process, and the cantonment of the rebels set for October 28 did not take place as planned. The hostilities between the ADC and GSPC, and Algeria's role in supporting the ADC, have likely rendered the Accords' provision regarding rebel disarmament problematic. The comment by the Territorial Administration Official crediting the GSPC's actions against the ADC as a helpful contribution to Mali's Tuareg rebel problem is jarring. It also contrasts sharply with Minister Kone's recent remarks to the Ambassador (reftel) that Mali is

impatient with Algeria's choice of the ADC vice the Malian military in fighting the GSPC. The dichotomy of views between two Presidential insiders gives insight into the torn sentiments at senior GOM levels, based in lingering mistrust of the Tuaregs, and frustration over GOM ability to control its territory. Whether the GOM is secretly content to let the ADC keep arms to weaken the GSPC, or the ADC is emboldened by Algerian support to refrain from disarming, neither tendency is promising for the disarmament piece of the Algiers Accords. The deteriorating security situation also makes the repositioning of Malian military forces around and within Kidal increasingly unlikely. For Acherif, the only way to save the accords is to skip the provisions on disarmament and military repositioning and proceed directly to the creation of "all-nomad" military units. Were the GOM able to grandfather the ADC into the military as "specialized" units, it would convert the ADC from an Algerian proxy force into an arm of the Malian military. Such a course would reassure a variety of GOM concerns in the north.

McCulley